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The hero of Allan Sillitoe's novel, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner," differs in many ways from the typical modern existential hero. Unlike the anti-hero, Smith is not searching for values, for he understands what life is and accepts it. He follows a code of honesty and hates "phonies." He is aware of class distinctions and sees the world as a confrontation between the "In-laws" and the "Out-laws"; he recognizes himself as one of the Out-laws but is not dismayed or less alienated by the situation. Like the anti-hero, he is lonely, but the main distinction between Smith and the anti-hero is that, while the anti-hero abstains from contact with society, Sillitoe's hero deliberately becomes involved in fighting society, thus alienating himself. For example, he trains for the race and then deliberately loses it. Smith's "proud, stubborn, and independent spirit is the source of his loneliness, and the source of his heroism." (LH)

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ALLAN SILLITOE'S LONELY HERO

by Jennifer Obst, St. Catherine's College

Sean O'Faolain, in his book The Vanishing Hero, traces what he sees as the disintegration of the conventional concept of the social hero in modern fiction and the development of a new type of hero. The hero of fiction had been the morally respectable man, the not too complicated creature of, for instance, Stevenson's, or Thackeray's or Dickens' novels. This new hero, on the other hand, is a very introspective creature, who has rejected society and its values and is searching for some of his own. The modern hero is actually an anti-Hero. His struggle is not an external struggle

against an adversary; it is an inward struggle. A modern anti-Hero is much given to asking questions like "Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" and "Is it all worth it?" and is likely to come up with some negative answers if, indeed, he manages to come up with any answers at all. As Dostoevsky's anti-Hero in Notes from the Underground explains. "We don't even know where living exists, what it is, and what it is called." (New York, 1960. P. 115.)

> This anti-Hero is a much less tidy and comfortable concept than the social hero since--being deprived of social sanctions--he is always trying to define himself. He is always represented as being groping, puzzled, cross, mocking, frustrated, isolated in his manful or blundering attempts to establish his own personal suprasocial codes. (Sean O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero. Boston, 1957. P. 19.)

The contemporary anti-Hero in fiction is an existential man, full of inward anxieties. If this is our concept, then Alan Sillitoe's hero in Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner is not a typical modern anti-Hero. He cannot be considered a modern anti-Hero because, although he is an existential man, he is not full of inward anxieties, he is not vainly attempting to establish his own suprasocial codes, he understands what life is and wouldn't think of running away from it.

Sillitoe's hero is Smith, a Borstal (reformatory) boy of seventeen, who is allowed to train for a big race by going for long solitary runs through the fields and woods and who then deliberately fumbles the race within sight of the rope. From his long soliloquies while he is training we get a clear picture of his view of life. Smith's society is a slum society, a material world where only immediate goods can be counted on--the pleasures of beer, women, fags and the telly. In this society Smith sees two opposed classes--the In-laws, the governor, the coppers, the "snotty-nosed dukes and ladies" who make the rules and dangle the bait, and the Out-laws, who break the rules and who try to nibble the bait without getting hooked. Smith, as a member of the Out-law class, accepts this conflict matter-of-factly. As he says, "We don't see eye to eye with them and they don't see eye to eye with us so that's how it stands and how it will always stand." (Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, p. 7.)

Sillitoe's hero, unlike the modern anti-Hero, is not dismayed by this situation. He lives in a slum world, which to anyone who had lived in a more comfortable setting would be a spirit-breaking machine that could only degrade him. But as he happened to be born there and not elsewhere, to him it is not the worst kind of life, or even anything to be afaid of. (John Rosselli, "A Cry from the Brick Streets," The Reporter, Nov. 10, 1960, p. 40.) In contrast to the modern anti-Hero who is introspective and bewildered, Sillitoe's hero is distinctly free from anxiety or self-doubt. He has, an a matter of fact, a strong sense of his own worth. He knows that "what counts in this life is cunning" and he knows he is more

cunning than the In-laws. He knows that he is alive and they are dead. As he says:

> At the moment it's dead blokes like the governor as have the whip hand over blokes like me, and I'm almost dead sure it will always be like that but even so, by Christ, I'd rather be like I am--always on the run and breaking into shops for a packet of fags and a jar of jam--than have the whip-hand over somebody else and be dead from the toenails up." (Loneliness, p. 13.)

Smith deliberately loses the governor's race because he will not join the system that trained and ordered and jailed him. Although losing means six more months of carting dustbins and scrubbing floors instead of kindness from the governor and easy jobs, the runner is too proud to lose his own race.

Smith is not searching for values as any self-respecting modern hero should be doing. The essence of the code Smith lives by is honesty. To be honest is to be true to himself and admit that between the In-laws and the Out-laws there can be nothing but war. He has respect for those that admit this and nothing but comtempt for those like the governor who pretend to ignore it. He says:

> At least Old Hitler-face the plain-clothes dick was honester than the governor, because he at any rate had had it in for me and I for him and when my case was coming up in court a copper knocked at our front door at 4 o'clock in the morning and got my mother out of bed when she was paralytic tired, reminding her she had to be in court at dead on half-past nine. It was the finest bit of spite I've ever heard of, but I would call it honest, the same as my Mam's words were honest when she really told that copper what she thought of him and called him all the dirty names she'd ever heard of, which took her half an hour and woke the terrace up. (Loneliness, p. 37.)

Sillitoe's hero hates phonies as much as Salinger's anti-Hero, Holden Caulfield, hates them. But Smith does not feel threatened by their hypocrisy as Holden Caulfield does. Smith recognizes it and rejects it, with contempt.

Another characteristic that distinguishes the Sillitoe hero from the typical anti-Hero is Smith's class-consciousness. He is quite willing to call himself a member of the Out-law class, while the anti-Hero rejects any sort of class affiliation. Actually, however, this membership does not decrease Smith's alienation or loneliness. He does feel a certain unity with his fellow Out-laws, he knows his pals are rooting for him when he refuses to win the governor's race, he is glad his mate Mike, who helped him with the bakery job that put him in the Borstal in the first place, escaped scot free. But this fellow-feeling is pretty superficial. As

James Gindin says, "None of Sillitoe's characters talk of brotherhood or united action, they simply realize that others are caught in the same way they are." ("Alan Sillitoe's Jungle," Postwar British Fiction, Los Angeles, 1962. P. 19.) If Smith realizes that many must run the same race, he knows that ultimately it is a race that each one must run by himself. The only time Smith will stop running alone is, as he says "when I'm dead...Until then I'm a long-distance runner crossing country all on my own no matter how bad it feels." (Loneliness, p.44.)

His loneliness, then, he shares with the modern anti-Hero. The cause of his loneliness, however, sets him apart. This is perhaps the main distinction between Sillitoe's hero and the anti-Hero. His loneliness stems not from refusing to have anything to do with society, refusing to even fight it as the modern anti-Hero, for example the Meursault, does, but from exactly the opposite attitude. To use a metaphor Sillitoe uses in his novel Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, his hero bites the bait the In-laws hold out for him, then fights at the line, refusing to be hauled in passively. He is fighting alone, but he is not frightened of his aloneness like the anti-Hero, as a matter of fact, he is relishing the fight. As Arthur Seaton, the young brash, factory worker and hero of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, says, "If you went through life refusing all the bait dangled before you, that would be no life at all. No changes would be made and you would have nothing to fight against. Life would be as dull as ditchwater." (Saturday Night, p. 188.)

This view is the direct opposite of the one held by an anti-Hero like Dostoevsky's in Notes from the Underground, who says, "We are all divorced from life, we are all cripples, everyone of us, more or less. We are so far divorced from it that we immediately feel a sort of loathing for actual 'real life' and so cannot even stand to be reminded of it." (P. 114.)

Smith's view of his existence is "It's a good life, if you don't give into the coppers and Borstal-bosses and the rest of them bastard-faced In-laws." (Loneliness, p. 11.) Seaton draws the same conclusion; "Well it's a good life and a good world, all said and done, if you don't weaken." (Saturday Night, p. 190.)

Sillitoe's hero won't weaken, because there is a tough core of individuality in him that the In-laws cannot touch, that society cannot violate. This proud, stubborn, independent spirit is the source of his loneliness, and the source of his heroism.